

IN THE METROPOLIS¹

By BENJAMIN ROSENBLATT

(From *Brief Stories*)

SHE sat in a show window of a large department store. "A prize to those who make her laugh," read a conspicuous sign over her head. An American flag was wrapped around her slim figure; a sword which she clutched with both hands rested on her lap with its point towards a placard announcing a bargain sale.

She sat motionless, her eyes wide open, her face hardly betraying a trace of life.

All day long she sat there, while multitudes passing on the sidewalk turned their heads towards her and wondered: "Is it a living woman or a wax figure?" It was this puzzle which held the pedestrian, and caused the manager of the store to chuckle at his own cleverness. When he saw in the morning this bashful country girl shuffling into the store and asking inaudibly for a job, he caught at the chance for novelty in the advertising of his sale. Her features were so immobile; she appeared, on the whole, so lifeless that his agile mind had promptly pictured her in her present setting.

Unceasingly the crowd surged before the window. News-boys with bundles under their arms, messengers in uniform, girls with lunch boxes in their hands, even trim-looking business men—all forgot their errands for a few minutes, and directed their mingled breath towards that window. Some of the boys stood for hours, sticking out their tongues, puffing up their cheeks, grinning and grimacing in a vain effort to get a smile from that grim apparition.

Though she was alone inside the window, still it seemed to her as if she were thrown into that seething mass before

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her, as if jostled and mercilessly kicked about. How strange everything! How confusing to her!

In the morning, when she learned there was work for her at the store, she was so happy that she thought of writing home at once about her good luck. But in the evening, after her first day's work, she was so exhausted that the girls of the establishment who took her to their boarding-house, had to lead her under her arms. She walked and wondered: the manager had said there was absolutely no work attached to her job.

At the supper-table, the girls, good naturedly, poked fun at her; and she grew livelier. Later, some of them had a romp, and decided that the feet of the uncouth lass were surely more used to follow the cows to pasture, than to dance.

The next morning the girls hurried feverishly. They paid little attention to the "rustic clown." Some had slept too late; they looked anxious and careworn. Last evening's warmth had all evaporated, and the "wax figure" felt a strange chill and a sinking at the heart.

Again she took her seat in the show window. She was faint, not having been in the mood for breakfast, and before long dizziness overtook her. She felt as if she looked into some deep water from which a wave suddenly emerged—a huge wave that roared, groaned, moved towards her, striving to engulf her, to carry her away.

Still, she appeared on that second day conscious of things she had not observed at first. The cars that thundered back and forth seemed new, and she noted the elevated overhead. The crowds were again as large and again as busy making "faces" which frightened her into immobility, so that it became harder for the people to get her attention, and most of them wondered: "Will she ever smile?"

In the afternoon it rained. The electric lights began to twinkle early, and a sea of umbrellas moved, moved endlessly before the motionless figure in the window.

She stared at the rumbling taxis that splashed hither and thither; at the zig-zag drizzle, the steady downpour, and her eyes suddenly filled. Thoughts of home were awakened within her by the rain. Her brain and heart.

hitherto as if congealed by the terror of the strange world before her, now thawed and filled her with a gnawing sadness and self-pity. How is it at home now? her thoughts ran. How is it at home? It rains. There is the muddy road, the ruts and the pools. Father is indoors now, back from the field. The gray dusk falls. Mother sits with folded arms by the window and gazes longingly out into the dark.

"Are you looking for me?" the figure in the window, forgetting herself, suddenly wailed. "Mother, mother dear, take me to you. I ain't used to this; I'm so lonely and afraid."

Her lips trembled visibly. A spasm shot across her face and contracted it—and many of the crowd outside who made "mouths" at her, burst into a triumphant hurrah. "She laughed!" roared a colored man so loud that it reached the manager, who forthwith decided to discharge the "figure." "I get the prize," yelled others. "I made her laugh! I made her laugh!"

FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SOUTH¹

By WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

(From *The Pictorial Review*)

THE day had been dead hot. Under the weight of the afternoon one would have thought it could never be cool again in the Mزاب. But immediately the sun had dipped behind the cliff that guards the western rim of the oasis the thin air emptied itself, and the night-chill, penetrating and treacherous, flowed over the dry bottom of the *oued*.

The town stirred. Under my gallery there came and went a word-fight between Berber muleteers from the north. After that I heard the evening call of the muezzin dropping down from the mosque-tower on the crowded hill, arid, sinuous, like the note of another wooden well-wheel shrilling above the desert floor. Then somewhere under a house arose the hollow voice of a tambour struck with a thumb, and a man sang. In a rift of silence a wandering breeze threshed all the date-fronds in the *oued*-bottom with a phantom of distant applause. Nearer at hand a foot-suffle in the dusk. A choked laugh. And all around in the heavy shadows of that quarter the subdued giggling, the rustling, and jewel-clanking of the women of dark delight.

"What's wrong with the Ouled Naïl girls to-night?" I asked along the gallery. Abd, son of Abdallah the Moza-bite, rose to his feet on the tiles near the stair, a white wraith.

"*Kain kairouan ja, sidi.*" (There is a caravan come.)

Drums banged; women scurried. The momentous night was established and stars sprinkled the sky, large and restless stars, always flickering a little to the eye in that air without body.

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